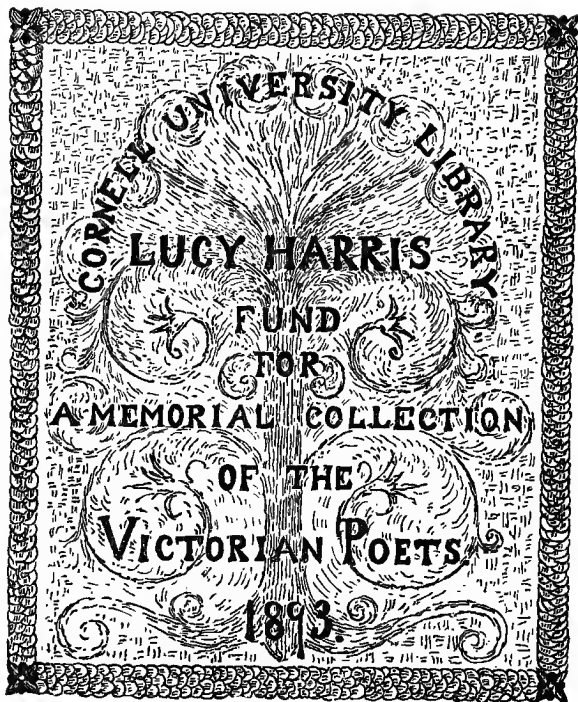


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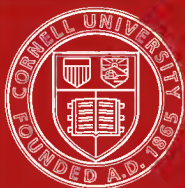
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SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE
AND OTHER POEMS



MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

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TORONTO

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

POET LAUREATE

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1908

L.L.

Ps

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TO
W. J. COURTHOPE, C.B.
LATE PROFESSOR OF POETRY IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
AND AUTHOR OF
THE 'HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY,'
THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED
IN CONSECRATION OF
THIRTY YEARS OF UNBROKEN FRIENDSHIP

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SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

“SACRED and Profane Love,” the name ascribed by tradition to the well-known picture by Titian in the Villa Borghese, Rome, suggested the title of the following Poem. The Picture has long been regarded as symbolical; and symbolical, likewise, is the Poem. But the symbolism of the latter is, as far as the author knows, distinct from any hitherto ascribed to the Picture; contrasting, as it does, Worldly Ambition with Spiritual Aspiration, the Political career in its lower aspect with the Literary career in its highest.

SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE

IN the dark shadow of the windless pines
Whose gloomy glory lines the obsequies
Of the gaunt Claudian Aqueduct along
The lone Campagna to sepulchral Rome,
A Northern youth, companionless, reclined,
Pondering on records of the Roman Past,
Kingdom, Republic, Empire, longwhile gone.
Hard-by, through marble tomb revived,
Rippled and bubbled water crystalline,
Inwelling from the far-off Sabine hills.
When lo ! upon the tomb's deep-dinted rim

Slowly there broadened on his gaze two shapes,
Material embodiment of those
The great Venetian in resplendent hues
Upon the canvas lastingly portrayed,
Christened by fame Profane and Sacred Love.
One was in rich habiliments arrayed,
With dimpling folds about her rounded limbs,
And heaving corset of embossed brocade,
Compressing beaker for her brimming breasts.
Jewels were in her hair, jewels entwined
Themselves round her columnar throat, and thus
On him she gazed unshrinkingly, and seemed
Sensuous seduction irresistible.
The other in nude innocence clad,
All save veined vineleaf cincture round her waist,
Sate with her gaze averted, and beheld
Only her image trembling in the wave.

Her had he fain accosted, but the dread
Of violating her aloofness checked
The movement of his mind, and held him mute.
So to the One resplendently enrobed,
Familiarly fearless as herself,
He turned, albeit his thought was elsewhere,
As elsewhere his desire, and boldly said :
“ If with your earthly seeming be conjoined
Gift and capacity of earthly speech,
Speak to me, earthly, an you will, and break
The all too spacious silence with your voice.”
Her curving lips, whose fulness seemed to pledge
Intoxicating kisses, drooped apart,
And to her orbs upsurged volcanic fire,
As she with prompt unhesitating voice,
Commanding more than musical, rejoined.
Whereat that Other ever and anon

Would for a moment turn to him her face,
To note the interpretation of his heart
And wavering of his will, and then once more
Her look averted to the Sabine hills,
And cloudless vault of overarching Heaven.

PROFANE LOVE *speaks*

I

“I am the Goddess mortals call Profane,
Yet worship me as though I were divine ;
Over their lives, unrecognised, I reign,
For all their thoughts are mine.

II

“I was coeval with the peopled Earth,
And, while it lasts, I likewise shall endure,
For Destiny endowed me at my birth
With every mundane lure.

III

“Men rear no marble temple to my name,
No statues mould in Minster or in mart,
Yet in their longings silently proclaim
My throne is on their heart.

IV

“Unto the phantom Deities of air
They pay lip homage, carven altars raise,
To these bow down with ceremonial prayer,
And sycophantic praise.

V

“With them I kneel, but neither praise nor pray,
While tapers burn, hymns float, and organ rolls,
Because I know that there too can I sway
And stupefy their souls.

VI

“ Their pompous flatteries are not for me,
My panegyric is the secret sigh :
Wherefore should mortals monuments decree
To Me who cannot die ?

VII

“ I am the fountain of wealth, titles, power,
’Tis I ordain the pedestals and bust,
When there doth toll the inevitable hour,
The hour of death and dust.

VIII

“ Ruby, and pearl, and diamond, and the ore
Torn from the entrails of the Earth, are mine ;
Mine are the cargoes shipped from shore to shore,
Spices, and silks, and wine :

IX

“Wherewith men buy what crafty barter brings,—
Greater the gain, more hazardous the risks,—
Toil from the many, coronets from Kings,
And lust from odalisques.

X

“If such content not, since your hopes aspire
On heights of popularity to tower,
I can conduct you on yet swifter tire
To winning-peak of Power.

XI

“Then without scruple, pity, or restraint,
Cleave you your conquering way ; for there is
nought,
Of all that worldlings crave and hirelings paint,
But can be seized or bought.

XII

“ Myriads from mine and furrow, quay and loom,
 Shall congregate to hear you pledge and prate,
Hailing you heaven-sent warder-off of gloom,
 And Saviour of the State.

XIII

“ And lissom sirens, temptingly attired,
 With heartless hearts, self-seeking as your own,
By your sonorous phrases will be fired,
 And gather round your throne.

XIV

“ Platform and Senate, Cabinet and Court,
 You shall cajole, convert, or overawe ;
Whitherso’er you speciously disport,
 Your wordy Will be law.

XV

“ But many and many a worshipper have I,
So cannot grant monopoly of power :
Others there be who fain would climb as high
As you, and have their hour.

XVI

“ Then their ambition with your own will shock,
And they awhile on foremost seat may reign :
Men’s favour is a quicksand, not a rock,
And veers like gust and vane.

XVII

“ Then must you with invectives fume and rage
All through the land, denouncing evil times,
With histrionic passion ; ’tis a stage
For mountebanks and mimes—

XVIII

“Slandering the foes who slander you, and so,
If thousands hate, thousands will hail, your name,
Till you in notoriety shall grow,
The herd confound with Fame.

XIX

“Them that o’erwhelm, vindictiveness o’erwhelms,
So nought shall you from Fortune’s wheel entice,
Gambling for Self’s predominance with Realms
And Empires for your dice.

XX

“If with the years male energy should wane,
Orders and honours on you shall be shed :
Thus will you still in man’s remembrance reign,
A halo round your head.

XXI

“ And when at length the End of all life’s ends
Doth with the little lay the mighty down,
And domination finally descends
Graveward without its Crown,

XXII

“ Processions populous, bedizened hearse,
And mourners ermined shall your dust convey
To pompous tomb, and vying prose and verse
Protract your little day.

XXIII

“ What though your name grow faint, as time
recedes,
Like scarce-heard wave upon a far-off shore,
And wax the record of your words and deeds
A voice and nothing more,

XXIV

“ You will have drained all that the world can give,
All boons and blandishments of Love Profane,
Success and homage, for which sane men live,
And all the rest is vain.”

She ceased ; and, as she ceased, then Sacred Love,
That ever and anon meanwhile had bent
On him her look, and smilingly surmised,
From his vague gaze and inattentive ears,
That he was only waiting for Her voice,
Like to the moon fleeting through fleecy clouds,
Her undissembled beauty on him bared,
And with a voice like sylvan rivulet
That haunts the woodlands, muffled half by leaves,
Serene and slow with silvery clearness spake.

I

“In the unseen first-fostering of breath
Whose secret is by Science vainly sought,
Uncertain borderland 'twixt Life and Death,
I share the silence of the Mother's thought.

II

“Her love is not more anxious than is mine,
Together we await the human cry,
For even then I, Sacred Love, divine
If it will grow to voice that may not die.

III

“And I its foster-mother am, and feed
Its suckling dreams, and watch it waxing strong,
Giving it for its plaything moorland reed,
That it may grow and ripen into Song.

IV

“For Love Profane doth sleeplessly await
Its coming, to mislead it on its way,
Whispering, ‘Become what Greatness deemeth
great,
Till mighty Rulers recognise your sway.’

V

“I listened tremblingly while Love Profane
Strove to entice you to the worldling’s throne,
Along the worldling’s way, but strove in vain.
Now hath She gone, and we are here alone.”

His gaze that had on Her who thuswise spake
Fastened, since indivisibly intent
Upon the cadence of her voice, quick turned
At these last words, to look for Love Profane.

But lo ! its effigy from marble rim
Had vanished, like the face of Roman sway,
Kingship, Republic, Empire ; and the flow
Of water welling through the rifled tomb
Was the sole sound he heard, until her voice
Melodiously measured, spake once more.

VI

“ Rise and come near to me, and take my hand,
And lay your cheek against my cheek, for sign
That you henceforth will know and understand
That all the children of the Muse are mine.

VII

“ Your parent am I, though I seem so young,
It is my birthright never to grow old ;
Young shall I keep so long as songs are sung,
By such fresh offspring gladdened and consoled.

VIII

“I was beside the font when you were brought
 Into the granite-pillared House of Prayer ;
Smiled at your loneliness when first you sought
 To sing away your load of childish care.

IX

“Rapture maternal fluttered in my heart
 When you yourself disdainfully denied
What worldlings prize, and chose the better part,
 Wending where now I find you at my side.

X

“I know your present sorrow, since you fear
 I have forsaken you and left you lone,
And Rome has silenced what you held so dear.
 Wait ! from the unseen seed the flower is grown.

XI

“Rome is the tomb of Heroes, and of Kings,
Consuls, and conquerors, and world-wide sway :
What wonder, should it silence him that sings
Before he learns what he must sing and say ?

XII

“But you may live and die, a Voice unheard :
I promise not what I can not fulfil :
Only,—in the Beginning was the Word,
It was with God, and it is godlike still.

XIII

“But unto you, as unto all my line,
Or strong or weak, resounding or obscure,
I pledge the gifts inalienably mine,
Gifts that content and pleasures that endure :

XIV

“Companionship of woodlands, hills, and streams,
And gentle womenkind, to whom you owe
Youth in your heart, and shaping of your dreams,
And these will teach what more you need to
know.

XV

“Nature’s still fresh society will keep
Your feelings young, as you each April follow
Coy maiden Spring, when she awakes from sleep
In windflower dell and primrose pillowed hollow:

XVI

“Watch Autumn wax in splendour day by day,
Then, slowly yielding unto Time’s assault,
Her moribund magnificence decay,
To sleep entombed in Winter’s icy vault;

XVII

“And when the boughs stretch bare and fallows
hoar,
And plovers wheel about the moorland wide,
Hear the pinched wind wailing through chink and
door,
With piteous prayer to share the warm fireside.

XVIII

“Nature’s capriciousness leaves just the same
Her inmost self; she does nor change nor veer;
Just as the seasons lend, with varying name,
Their contrast to the oneness of the year.

XIX

“The Poet’s love no base-bred difference knows
Of high and low, the peasant and the peer,
Save that his tenderness more heed bestows
On humble sorrow than luxurious tear.

XX

“ Childhood’s keen questioning, Youth’s gropings
blind,
Manhood’s ambition, Age’s graver part,
Alike can move his understanding mind,
And rouse his promptly sympathising heart.

XXI

“ Here, ’mid the ruins that you now behold,
You will imbibe the meaning of the Past,
Learning to weigh the new by what is old,
The things that perish, and the things that last.

XXII

“ Instructed thus, keep severed in your mind
The Passing from the Permanent, and prize
Only the precious heirlooms of Mankind,
Thought that ennobles, Art that vivifies.

XXIII

"Vex not your mind with riddles that beguile
The unwise to wrangle over things unknown.
'Tis not for Song to enrage, but reconcile,
So to the Tower of Babel add no stone.

XXIV

"But while from futile feuds you dwell apart,
Never forget to render what is due,
In hour of need, from manly hand and heart,
To the male Land whose soil engendered you.

XXV

"Should opulence, and ease, and base desire
Deaden effeminate ears to just alarms,
Sound all the clanging octaves of the lyre,
And rouse a nation's manhood unto arms,

, XXVI

“Save only then, no clamorous crowds must mar
The musing silence of secluded days,
Whose course should journey quiet as a star,
That moves alone along Heaven’s trackless ways.

XXVII

“Then will you ‘mid deserted Abbey walls
Hear both the matin and the vesper bell,
The girdled Brothers chanting in their stalls,
And see the Prior praying in his cell.

XXVIII

“The Present and the Past shall seem but one,
Kingdoms, and Creeds, and Sceptres, passed
away,
Stand out, in retrospection’s noonday sun,
As Kingdoms, Creeds, and Sceptres, of to-day.

XXIX

“ In the fair hospitable Tuscan Land,
Where Raphael and Donatello wrought,
Sojourn, and ponder till you understand
The masculine restraint themselves were taught—

XXX

“ Taught by the disinterred Minervan mind
That, in the days still governing if gone,
Within the rugged Parian block divined
Majestic calmness of the Parthenon.

XXXI

“ And when, departing hence, you wandering wend
Where the brief Attic splendour dawned and
shone,
Pray to Athene she to you will lend
The golden curb she lent Bellerophon.

XXXII

“Nor be the Hill Hellenic sculptors trod
Your one sole haunt, but, let who will condemn,
Kneel at all altars ‘To the Unknown God,’
Alike at Athens or Jerusalem.

XXXIII

“Siren and seraph, athlete, anchorite,
Saints of the cloister, satyrs of the grove,
In one and all seek meaning and delight,
Reigning Jehovah, abdicated Jove.

XXXIV

“Deem not the Oracles to-day are dumb;
They from their graves the World’s course still
forecast,
From things long gone expound the things to come,
And prophesy the Future from the Past.

XXXV

“ And not from Gothic shrine and classic urn,
From dome, or spire, or portico alone,
Study the mystery of Art, but learn
From each in turn to apprehend your own.

XXXVI

“ Not least from its loved twin, melodious sound,
The universal unseen soul of things,
Whose utterance men invoke when words are found
Powerless to frame their vague imaginings.

XXXVII

“ And, when the riper Youth that men call Age
Welcomes the closing dispensation, death,
Song that soothes sorrow and makes suffering sage,
Shall linger with you till your farewell breath.

XXXVIII

“Not crowded aisle and ceremonial nave
Claim those that have from me life’s lesson learned.
Who best have loved them bear them to their grave,
Where they near home lie ‘quietly inurned.’”¹

Then, like the cadence of a closing song,
Her soft voice sank to silence, and he felt
Her arms fold round him, and so widened his,
Eager to share in privileged embrace :
When, lo ! the vision vanished with the voice, •
And all he saw were the calm Sabine hills,
And all he heard, the lisp of the wave
Clear-welling through the rifled marble tomb.
But all She had said sank deep into his heart,
And what She said is truly written here.

¹ *Hamlet*, i. 4.

OTHER POEMS

A SHAKESPEARE MEMORIAL

WHY should we lodge in marble or in bronze
Spirits more vast than earth, or sea, or sky?
Wiser the silent worshipper that cons
Their words for wisdom that will never die.
Unto the favourite of the passing hour
Erect the statue and parade the bust ;
Whereon decisive Time will slowly shower
Oblivion's refuse and disdainful dust.
The Monarchs of the Mind, self-sceptred Kings,
Need no memento to transmit their name :
Throned on their thoughts and high imaginings,
They are the Lords, not sycophants of Fame.
Raise pedestals to perishable stuff :
Gods for themselves are monuments enough.

THE WIND SPEAKS

I

“ IN the depth of Night, on the heights of Day,
Would you know where I rest or roam ?
In vain will you search, for I nowhere stay,
And the Universe is my home.

II

“ When you think to descry on the craggy steep
My skirts as I mount and flee
From the wrecks I have wrought, I am sound asleep
In the cradles rocked by the sea.

III

“ There is never an eye that hath seen my helm,
 Though I traverse the ocean's face ;
There is never a foot that hath trod my Realm,
 Or can guide to my dwelling-place.

IV

“ Then how will you challenge my Will and me,
 Or, how what I do, arraign ?
Bewail as you may, I alone am free,
 You can neither imprison nor chain.

V

“ Your dungeons clang on the blood-red hand,
 And fetter the monster's claw.
If I merge 'neath the wave, if I level on land,
 It is that my will is law.

VI

“ You have cleared the main of the corsair’s keel,
And the forest of outlaws’ tread ;
Your hounds follow swift on the felon’s heel,
And the trail of the ravisher fled.

VII

“ But when I harry the woods, or scour
The furrows of foam for prey,
The blushing bloom of the Spring deflower,
Or outrage the buds of May,

VIII

“ Where, where are they that can hunt me down,
Or catch up my tacking sail,
Can bridle my lust with scourge or frown,
As I speed me away on the gale ?

D

IX

“ I heed no menace, I hark no prayer
And, if I desire, I sate :
'Tis but when I want not that I spare,
But neither from love nor hate.

X

“ Let the feeble falter in their intent,
Or, slaking it, feel remorse.
Though I never refrain, I never repent
I am nothing but Will and Force.

XI

“ The flocks of the wandering waves I hold
In the hollow of my hand,
And I let them loose, like a huddled fold,
And with them I flood the land ;

XII

“ Till they swirl round villages, hamlets, thorpes,
As the cottagers flee for life :
Then I fling the fisherman’s flaccid corpse
At the feet of the fisherman’s wife.

XIII

“ I blow from the shore as the surges swell,
And the drenched barque strains for port,
But heareth in vain the lighthouse bell
And the guns of the hailing fort.

XIV

“ Where speedeth the horseman o’er sand or veldt
That boasteth a seat like mine ?
I ride without stirrup, or bit, or belt,
On the back of the bounding brine.

XV

"And it rears and plunges, it chafes and foams,
But I am its master still,
And its mettle I tame till it halts or roams
At whatever pace I will.

XVI

"I shatter the stubborn oak, and blanch
The leaves of the poplar tree,
And sweep all the chords of bough and branch,
Till I make them sound like the sea.

XVII

"O, where is there music like to mine,
When I muster my breath and roll
Through the organ pipes of the mountain pine,
Till they fill and affright the soul?

XVIII

“Then smoothly and softly, ’twixt shore and shore,
I float on the dreaming mere ;
And motionless then you suspend your oar,
And listen, but cannot hear.

XIX

“For I have crept to the water’s edge,
And deep under reed-mace crest
Am faintly fanning the seeded sedge,
Or rocking the cygnet’s nest.

XX

“If I strip the maidenly birches bare
Of their dainty transparent dress,
It is that their limbs may look more fair
In their innocent nakedness.

XXI

" I weave from the leaves of the beech-capped steep
 A coverlet gold and red,
And under its quiet warmth I creep,
 And sleep till the snows are fled.

XXII

" Then I wake, and around the maiden's feet
 I flutter each fringe and fold,
And playfully ripple the vestal pleat
 That hints of her perfect mould.

XXIII

" I linger round dimpled throat and mouth,
 Till her warm lips fall apart,
And with the breath of the scented south
 Keep thawing her chaste cold heart.

XXIV

“ Then she harks to the note of the nightingale
And the coo of the mated dove,
And murmurs the words of the poet's tale,
Till the whole of her life is Love.

XXV

“ I unlimber the thunder, I aim the bolt,
Till the forest ranks waver and quail,
Then hurl down the hill and over the holt
My squadrons of glittering hail.

XXVI

“ I soar where no skylark mounts and sings,
But the heavenly anthems swell,
And fan with the force of my demon wings
The furnace of nethermost Hell.

XXVII

“Like the Soul of Man, like God’s Word and Will,
Whence I come and whither I go,
And where I abide when my voice is still,
You know not, and never shall know.”

SISYPHUS

MIDWAY his upward unavailing course
Sate Sisyphus, his back against his load,
Halting a moment from that task of doom.
Adown his swollen cheeks ran streams of sweat
Dripping from thick-drenched locks ; and watery
 beads
Gathered and stood on his stupendous limbs.
The sinews of his arm, like gnarled knots
On hollow bark of legendary oak,
Credentials of incalculable years,
Bulged up, and in his horny hands outspread
Upon his wrinkled knees, the arching veins

Glittered like tempered steel. His stertorous breath
Moaned like to bellows in cyclopean forge,
Wherewith in smithy subterranean
Against the Gods rebellious demigods
Fashion their molten ineffectual bolts.

But when, asudden, swift on angry flash,
Rumbled imperious thunder overhead,
At the commanding mandate, Sisyphus,
Bulkily rising, straightened limbs relaxed,
And turned him yet again unto his task,
Mumbling the while habitual lament.

“Why was I chosen for this hateful task,
Fantastically futile, which the Gods
Lay on their victim, for their own disport?
Rather a thousand times upon the wheel
Would I, Ixion-like, be racked, or lift

The tantalising gourd-cup to my lips.
I was no wickedder than they, and I
Founded Ephyra in a stony land,
Raised monolithic temples to the Gods,
And made the name of Corinth glorious from
Peloponnesus unto Attica.
Was it a crime to be Ulysses' sire
By sportive Anticlea ere she wed
Laertes, bringing him a Royal heir?
Yearning for whom, when Circe and her lures
From Ithaca withheld his bark, she died.
If such to me imputed be a crime,
Then all the Gods are bestial criminals,
Lustful, adulterous, meretricious Gods.
What more was my offence? Was it because
I from the clustered sister-Pleiades
Lured Merope to earth to share my love,

Not an ephemeral, but strong-nuptialled love?
Whereat the Gods, envying a mortal's joy,
Darkened her light in Heaven, and vengefully
In me infused her immortality,
That I might strain for ever at the task
Of aiding upward downward-destined world.

“If mortals were but once by doom allowed
To limit their ambition, and abide
On some material or majestic height !
But onward, upward, ever are they urged
By the half-God within their blood to pass
Beyond the flaming barriers of the world,
Where the inexorable sentries stand
To drive them back, and me, unwilling drudge,
Forced downward by the weight I upward rolled.
When to the very pinnacle of Art,

Majestically lovely, for restrained,
Hellenic minds from barbarous gropings towered,
The beast in mortals sensuously craved
For craft more carnal, Goddesses undraped
In marble, to such use recalcitrant,
Satyrs and fauns, licentious comedy,
Provocative of laughter or of lust,
Dethroning the Ideal for the Real.
When the stern Roman on the world imposed
By forceful dominance the Reign of Law,
Then did the East with tribute undermine
The male-won Empire, and barbarian hordes
Rent the Imperial marble from its limbs,
And revelled in the wreck of its decline.

“O, but now ! now ! now !

Heavier the load, weightier than ever yet,

For men, infatuated, now conceive,
Eliminating Spirit, they will find
In matter immaterialised the germ,
Fountain, and origin of all that moves.
But behind Fate there is another Fate,
And yet another, undiscoverable.
Yet Man, again illusioned, presses on,
Fondling the fancy he will shortly pierce
Unto the generating source of things,
The Atom atomless : whereat the Gods
Shake with ironic laughter, since themselves
Know it not, neither do they seek to know,
Aware, above them there are other Gods,
May-be one sole impenetrable God,
Never created, never dying, One
With the unbounded Universe, Himself
The soul and substance of Eternity.

That is my one last hope, that He will free
My body from this pagan servitude,
And with omnipotent mercifulness merge
My Being into His !”

MOZART'S GRAVE¹

I

WHERE lies Mozart? Tradition shows

A likely spot : so much, no more :

No words of his own time disclose

When crossed He to the Further Shore,

Though later ages, roused to shame,

On tardy tomb have carved his name.

¹ "Was haben sie da?" was the inquiry when the hearse drew up with Mozart's body at the gate of the cemetery. "Ein Kapellmeister," was the answer.

GROVE'S *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

II

The sexton asked, "What may this be?"

"A Kapellmeister." "Pass it in :

This common grave to all is free,

And for one more is room within.

It fills the fosse. Now tread it down,

With pauper, lunatic, and clown."

III

Yet had he wized with sound

Electors, Cardinals, and Kings,

While there welled forth from source profound

The flow of silvery-sounding springs,

Music of tenderness and mirth,

One with his very soul at birth.

IV

And they? Where are they now? The bust,
The elaborately carven tomb,
Whose scrolls, begrimed by age and dust,
None care to stoop and scan for whom,
Are all remaining to express
Their monumental nothingness.

V

Mitre, and coronet, and Crown,
Gaze into space that heeds them not,
Unmeaning pomp of dead renown,
Medley of Monarchs long forgot,
Who from the nations' ghastly strife
Won immortality—for life.

VI

Once, on Nile's bank an artist raised
A temple at the King's command,
And on it name august emblazed.
But when a flood submerged the land,
His name was washed away, and lo !
The artist's own stood out below.

VII

Thus vanish ostentatious lives,
But, through all time, belov'd Mozart,
Your magic memory survives,
Part of the universal heart :
In joy a sympathetic strain,
In sorrow, soother of our pain.

VIII

The Potentates on whom men gaze,
When once their Rule hath reached its goal,
Die into darkness with their days ;
But Monarchs of the mind and soul
With light unfailing and unspent
Illuminate Fame's firmament.

December 1907.

LINES WRITTEN ON VISITING THE
CHÂTEAUX ON THE LOIRE

1

“ RIVER rolling past the grey
Battlements of yesterday,
Palace strongholds reared by hands
Summoned from transalpine lands,
Skilled in wedding strength with grace,
Fort with stately dwelling-place,
Vizored brow with siren tress,
Majesty with loveliness,—

River, that beheld their sway
Dawn and dwindle, then decay,
Linger, loiter, while I sit,
As the sunshine-shadows flit,
Pondering pictures of the vast
Panorama of the Past,
And, with retrospective gaze,
Tell me of the vanished days."

11

Still the river rolled and rolled
'Twixt its banks of green and gold,
Winding, wandering, slowly through
Starwort white and speedwell blue,
Flowing onward, heedless where,
Irresponsive to my prayer.

III

But, as motionless I dreamed
Of dim yesterdays, there seemed
From the plain to reach mine ears
Murmurings of the bygone years,
Till the river's undertone
Blent its musings with my own.

IV

“Seaward I meander on,
All unchanged to gaze upon,
As when sceptre, pomp, and power,
Threatening parapet and tower,
Warrior grim and maiden gay
Fought and laughed the hours away :

Captains, Cardinals, and Kings,
Sepulchred with meaner things,
Nothing to distinguish now
Mitred head from minion brow,
Fleshless skull from fleshless skull,
Arrogant from beautiful ;
Nameless relics of a name :—
I alone abide the same.”

v

Lingering still, I sate and mused,
Thought and feeling interfused
With the Châteaux and the stream
In an intermittent dream,
Till the Future wore at last
Likeness to the shadowy Past,

And I wondered if to-day,
Loftily as yesterday,
Will, departing, leave behind
Monuments of heart and mind,
Love and reverence will restore,
When men dwell in them no more.

A FAREWELL

GOOD-BYE, old year, good-bye !

Gentle you were to many as to me,

And so we, meditating, sigh,

Since what hath been will be,

That you must die.

Hark ! In the crumbling grey church tower,

Tolls the recording bell

The deeply-sounding solemnising knell

For your last hour.

How quietly you die !

No canonised Saint

E'er put life by

With less of struggle or complaint.

You seem to feel nor grief nor pain,

No retrospection vain,

As if, departing, you would have us know

It is not hard to go,

Since pang is none, but only peace, in Death,

And Life it is that suffereth.

Closer and clearer comes the last slow knell,

And on my lip for you awaits

That final formula of Fate's,

The low, lamenting, lingering word, Farewell !

For you the curved-backed sexton need not stir

The mould, for there is nothing to inter,

No worn integument to doff,

No bodily corruption to put off ;

Begotten of the earth and sun,
And ending spirit-wise as you begun,
You pass, a mere memento of the mind,
Leaving no lees behind.

Hark ! What is that we hear ?
A quick-jerked, jocund peal,
Making the fretted church tower reel,
Telling the wakeful of a young New Year,
 Young, but of lusty birth,
 To face the masked vicissitudes of earth.

Let us, then, look not back,
Though smooth and partial was the track
 Of the receding Past,
But through the vista vast

Of unknown Future wend intrepid way,
Framed to contend and cope
With perils new by vanished yesterday,
Whose last bequests to Man are Love, and
Faith, and Hope.

WARDENS OF THE WAVE

I

Not to exult in braggart vein
Over a gallant foe,
Or boast of triumphs on the main,
The Gods alone bestow ;
Vainglorious clarion, clamorous drum,
For which the vulgar crave,
Not these, not any such, become
The Wardens of the Wave.

II

No, but when slumbering war-dogs wake,
To the last gasp of breath
Face combat for one's Country's sake,
With male disdain of death ;
For this did Nelson live and die,
Far from his Land and home,
Making his roof-tree of the sky,
His pillow on the foam.

III

And if our race to-day recall
His last triumphant doom,
Place wreaths on his unfading pall,
And flowers upon his tomb,

'Tis to remind us still to keep
Aggression's lust in awe,
And with dominion of the deep
Guard Freedom, Peace, and Law.

IV

And not alone upon the waves
That sentinel our shore,
Service that disciplines, not enslaves,
Should rule us, as of yore ;
So that our Island Citadel
May tranquilly respond
With the calm signal, "All is well,"
To every Sea Beyond.

PRIMACY OF MIND

Mens agitat molem.—Aeneidos Lib. vi.

I

ABOVE the glow of molten steel,
The roar of furnace, forge, and shed,
Protectress of the City's weal,
Now, Learning rears her loftier head ;

II

That Progress may at length descry
It lacks the clue to guide aright,
And, conscious of its blindness, cry
Unto the Muse, "More light ! More light !"

111

That Wealth may fitly yield the throne
To Letters, Science, artist-skill,
And Matter, willing subject, own
Mind must be lord and master still.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS,
6th October 1904.

A QUESTION ANSWERED

I

I SAW the lark at break of day
Rise from its dewy bed,
And, winged with melody, away
Circle to Heaven o'erhead.

II

I watched it higher and higher soar,
Still ceasing not to trill,
When, though I could descry no more
Its flight, I heard it still.

III

But shortly quavered back its note,
And, hovering into sight,
I saw it, homeward sinking, float
Over its nest of night.

IV

"Tell me," I cried, "glad songster, why
You, privileged to wend
Up to the blue and boundless sky,
Where only wings ascend,

V

"Full into Heaven, to look and gaze
Whither our thoughts aspire,
And, unrebuked, terrestrial lays
Blend with celestial choir,

VI

“Why you, thus welcomed to the height
Of minstrelsy and mirth,
Pavilioned high from mortal sight,
Come back again to Earth.”

VII

Then shook the lark again its wings,
And, fluttering o'er its bed
Deep-bosomed in the grassy floor,
In rippling answer said :—

VIII

“’Tis joy to mount, alone, aloft,
Into the ether clear,
And thence look down on garth and croft
Of red-roofed hamlets here.

IX

“To sing my song through endless space,
 Towering above, above,
While mortals watch with upturned face
 Of longing and of love ;

X

“Then, for a while, unseen to pass
 Through unsubstantial dome,
But treble back to tangled grass—
 Not Heaven, withal my home.

XI

“And tell me, when I skyward sing,
 Am I unlike to you,
That on Imagination's wing
 Strain sometimes out of view

XII

“Into the radiant Realms untrod
Song can alone descry,
And whilom join, by grace of God,
Angelic company

XIII

“Yet sink down from the firmament
Back to life’s dearth and dole,
Knowing full well that song was sent
To comfort and console.”

AWAKE! AWAKE!

“AWAKE, awake, for the Springtime’s sake,

March daffodils too long dreaming ;

The lark is high in the spacious sky

And the celandine’s stars are gleaming.

The gorse is ablaze, and the woodland sprays

Are as purple as August heather,

The buds unfurl, and mavis and merle

Are singing duets together.

“The rivulets run, first one by one,

Then meet in the swirling river,

And on out-peeping roots the sun-god shoots

The shafts of his golden quiver.

In the hazel copse the thrush never stops
Till with music the world seems ringing,
And the milkmaid hale, as she carries her pail,
Goes home to the dairy, singing :

“And the swain and his sweet in the love-lanes
meet,
And welcome and face each other,
Till he folds her charms in his world-wide arms,
With kisses that blind and smother.”

Then the daffodils came, aflame, aflame,
In orchard, and garth, and cover,
And out April leapt, first smiled, then wept,
And longed for her May-day lover.

DECEMBER MATINS

I

“WHY, on this drear December morn,

Dost thou, lone Misselthrush, rehearse thy
chanting?

The corals have been rifled from the thorn,

The pastures lie undenizened and lorn,

And everywhere around there seems a some-
thing wanting.”

Whereat, as tho’ awondering at my wonder,

And brooded somewhere nigh a love-mate
nesting,

He more loud and longer still
'Gan to tremble and to trill,
Height after height of sound robustly breasting ;
As if o'erhead were Heaven of blue, and under,
Fresh green leafage, and he would
Cleave with shafts of hardihood
The mists asunder.

11

Only the singer it is foresees,
Only the Poet has the voice foretelling.
When the ways harden and the sedge-pools freeze,
He hears light-hearted Spring upon the breeze,
And feels the hawthorn buds mysteriously
swelling.
Though to the eaves the icicles are clinging,
Or from the sunward gables dripping, dripping,

He with inward gaze beholds
Liberated flocks and folds,
The runnels leaping, and the young lambs
skipping,
And dauntless daffodils anew upspringing,
So throughout the wintry days
Meditates prophetic lays,
And keeps on singing.

111

Not the full-volumed Springtime song,
Not April's note with rapture overflowing,
Melodious cadence, early, late, and long,
Now low and suing, now serenely strong,
But the heart's intimations musically showing
That Love and Verse are never out of season.

Though the winds bluster, and the branches
splinter,
He, through cold and dire distress,
Companioned by cheerfulness,
Descries young Mayday through the mask of
Winter.
Doubt and despair to him were veiled treason,
Fashioned never to despond,
By Foreseeing far beyond
The range of Reason.

IV

Therefore, brave bird, sing on, for some to hear
If faintly, fitfully, and though to-morrow
Will be the shortest day of all the year,
Though fields be flowerless and fallows drear,
And earth seems cherishing some secret sorrow,

The dawn will come when it anew will glisten
With tears of gladness, glen and dingle waken,
Winter's tents be furled and routed,
April notes be sung and shouted,
Over the fleeing host and camp forsaken ;
The nightingale ne'er cease, the cuckoo christen
Hedgerow posies with its call,
And unto glee and madrigal
The whole world listen.

THE WHITE PALL OF PEACE

“There have been heavy falls of snow in various parts of the country. . . . The average depth of the snow is six inches.”—Telegrams from Pretoria and Capetown, *June 14th.*

I

OVER the peaceful veldt,

Silently, snowflakes fall !

Silently, slow, unfelt,

Cover the Past with a pall !

II

Brave brother Boers, let us hie

To your and our brothers dead ;

Over the spot where they lie

Tears, yours and ours, be shed !

III

Underneath turf, cross, and stone

Combat and discord be husht !

Blest be the heroes unknown,

Blest be their deeds and dust.

IV

Now that the war-clamours cease,

And silently snowflakes fall,

Give we the kiss of Peace,

And one Flag be the Flag of us all !

THE DANCE AT DARMSTADT

IN the city of Darmstadt, the Sabbath morn
Shone over the broad Cathedral Square,
And to nobly, richly, and lowly born,
The belfry carilloned call to prayer.

Then banker, and burgher, and learn'd in law,
With clean-cut forehead and firm-set jaw,
Master, and prentice, and tradesman trim,
Pikemen stalwart of port and limb,

Pledged to die for their native town,
Scholars stately in cap and gown,
Splendid and simple, halt and hale,
Rosy tapster and student pale,
Stepped from their thresholds, and gravely trod
The streets that lead to the House of God.
And, hurrying after them, maid and dame,
Wives, and daughters, and sweethearts, came,
All in their Sabbath best arrayed,
Delicate ribbon and dainty braid,
Creaseless corset and kirtle clean,
Of sombre homespun or silken sheen,
Rustling by with looks demure,
As bright as posies, and just as pure.
And tight to their kirtles their children clung,
With ambling footstep and nimble tongue,
Prattled and questioned them all the way,

Forgetting quite 'twas the Sabbath Day,
Till they came to the great Cathedral Square,
Where the organ pealed through the House of
Prayer.

“Now why do you waste the summer day?”
Cried a velveteed stripling with locks of gold,
And eyes like forget-me-nots in May,
When the milch-cows stream from the wintry fold.
“Week after week you troop in there,
To mutter and mumble the self-same prayer,
Through the self-same psalmody drowse and nod;
And that's what you, sooth, call praising God!
Look! the sun is shining on roof and spire,
And the wings of the swallow never tire,
The stork hovers over her callow nest,
And Spring is folded to Summer's breast.

There's a flutter of love in the lime-tree leaves,
And the starlings flute on the Rathhaus eaves.
Come away, come away where the sycamore swings
Its tassels of gold, and the blackbird sings,
Where the river swirls past a tangled ledge
Of willow-weed, meadow-sweet, thyme, and sedge,
Where the veins of the vine are flushed with juice,
And the trout in the stream past the miller's sluice
Cast wavering shadows on stone and sand ;
And, when we have rambled through all the land,
We will halt at the Inn with the Jocund Sign,
And freshen our throats with the Mosel wine.
But, ere ever we go, let us, hand in hand,
Be comrades sworn of a joyous band,
And, while they jabber and wail in there,
Have a dance in the sunny Cathedral Square."

Then tabor and viol began to sound,
And ribald and losel to beat the ground,
Boys who mocked at the Sacred Name,
And wantons brazening out their shame.
With languishing eyes and streaming hair,
They footed it all about the Square,
Footed, and frolicked, and revelled round,
To the viol's twang and the tabor's sound ;
Shouted, and clapped their hands for glee ;
Was never such madcap company :
Forward, backward, forward once more,
Like ebb and flow on a tidal shore,
Trooped together more near and near,
Like a troop of colts at a sound they fear,
Then scampered away and scattered wide,
Again to draw to each other's side ;
Hand within hand, and face to face,

Twirled and circled in lewd embrace,
Hurried, slackened, then swept along,
Trilling and trolling a shameful song,
Hurtful and hateful to godly ears.
Never, I ween, in all the years
Since the Autumn woods waxed sere and brown,
Was danced such a dance in Darmstadt town.

Now the sermon was over, the service done,
And the grave-faced worshippers, one by one,
Poured into the bright Cathedral Square,
And beheld the ungodly dancing there.
Then they cried, "Now, shame on you! Stay!

O stay!

Surely ye know 'tis the Sabbath Day,
The day of the merciful mighty Lord :
If ye flaunt His mercy, yet dread His sword !"

Yet never an instant the dancing stayed,
But ribald stripling, and wanton maid,
Gasped out, "Don't you see we are nigh to drop
With panting and pain, but we cannot stop.
The demons have entered our limbs, and we
No longer have power to pause or flee.
They force us to hammer the hard hot ground,
And make us pirouette round and round.
Will never some Christian soul advance,
And break the spell of this demon dance!"

Then the sober and godly would fain have heard
Piteous cry and panting word.
But a something stronger than human will
Fettered their feet, and kept them still
Helplessly watching the ghastly crew ;
So swiftly they whirled, and so fast they flew,

It made one giddy to see them there.
So, out of the broad Cathedral Square,
Banker and burgher, and learn'd in law,
With clean-cut forehead and firm-set jaw,
Master and prentice, and tradesman trim,
Pikemen stalwart of port and limb,
Sister, and sweetheart, and wife demure,
As fresh as posies, and just as pure,
With children clutching their mother's gown,
Homeward walked through the awestruck town.

But still, when the godly crowd had gone,
The derelict band went dancing on.
The sunlight glittered on roof and spire,
And the wings of the swallow did never tire,
The stork hovered over her callow nest,
And Spring was folded to Summer's breast.

Far away in the woodland the sycamore swung
Its tassels of gold, and the blackbird sung.
The river went swirling past tangled ledge
Of willow-weed, meadow-sweet, thyme, and
sedge.

The veins of the vine were flushed with juice,
And the trout poised still by the miller's sluice.
But, though longer and longer the shadows grew,
Still gambolled and anticked the ribald crew,
Wavered and wantoned in broken line,
As though mad-drunk with the Mosel wine,
Reeled and rolled till the sun went down,
And the stars shone over the darkened town,
Golden stars in a dome of blue ;
Careered and capered the whole night through,
Till their loose flesh flapped on their creaking
bones,

And they staggered and dropped on the hard dry
stones.

And when at last in a heap they lay,
Like refuse the scavenger carts away,
They throbbed up still, as at farmyard pyre
The flickering flames of an unfed fire ;
Nor yet from their ghastly gambols ceased,
Till the sun ensanguined the pallid East,
And the starlings piped on the Rathhaus eaves.

Never, never since wintry woods waxed brown,
Was danced such a dance in Darmstadt town.

LOVE'S WISDOM

Amor che nella mente mi ragiona.

DIVINA COMMEDIA, PURGATORIO, II. V. 110.

Love, that in my mind seeks Reason's aid.

Paraphrase.

I CRAVE not love, for it would only bring
Tears to your eyes, and anguish to your heart ;
I am in Autumn, you are still in Spring,
And you must linger after I depart.
Then to you Summer would scarce Summer be,
Vainly for you the roses bloom and climb,
Vainly Life's harvest ripen on the tree,
Withered by Winter long before its time.
Therefore, let loving, dear, be mine alone,
You yielding only tenderness and trust,
So that to you be widowhood unknown,
And you with tears not deify my dust.
Enough for me if in your voice, your eyes,
I dream of bliss, but strain not for the prize.

THE following lyric was written at a memorable moment, a few years back, when the defensive spirit of the nation was suddenly roused to the highest pitch. It was not published, because it was thought it might aggravate mischievously the popular emotion. If it is now printed here, it is only as a contributory reminder to the English People that they live in the presence, not of a passing, but of a permanent menace, against which it is their bounden duty, since they cherish Peace and detest War, to guard by every resource at their command, alike on sea and on land.

IF THEY DARE !

1

REALM of ocean-guarded Peace,
 Humming loom and grazing steer,
Farm, and forge, and woven fleece,
 Happier, homelier, year by year,
Hark ! athwart the wintry air,
Menace mutters, foemen glare :
Leave the shuttle, leave the share,
 For the spear !

II

Envious of her world-wide race,
Goaded by the greed and hate
Of the hungry and the base
For the opulent and great,
“ See,” they whisper, “ did we band
All against Her, hand-in-hand,
We might bring that haughty Land
Face with Fate.”

III

Plotters insolent and vain,
Muster then your servile swarms.
Moated by the unbridged main,
We but laugh at such alarms.

Blinded braggarts, to forget
England old is England yet,
And can meet, as once She met,
World in arms.

IV

Come athwart the ocean's crest,
Mob and Monarch, crowd and Crown !
Slavish East, or shrilling West,
Come, and strike at her renown.
Madmen ! by your threats inane
What is it ye hope to gain ?
Think of France, think of Spain,
Smitten down !

V

Derelict on wind and wave,
Tossing with the tossing tide,
Crushed by ice-floe, tombed in cave,
See the Armada's pomp and pride :
Prince and Pontiff, Rome and Spain,
Leagued against Her, leagued in vain ;
England and her mother-main
Side by side.

VI

Think of that self-sceptered King,
Cæsar not by birth but brain,
Who with arbitrary wing
Hovered over hill and plain :

Headlong from that haughty height
Forced to sue to England's might,
And accept, for eagle's flight,
Cage and chain !

VII

Still they cry, "She is alone,
And must truckle to our nod."
What ! with half the world her own !
What ! still wielding Neptune's rod !
She is lonely as the breeze,
Lonely as the stars or seas,
Lone, unreachable as these,
Lone as God !

VIII

Let the bandits then deride

Loneliness they shall not share.

We are lonely, unallied,

As the lion in his lair.

Doubters, dastards, now be dumb :

Sound the clarion ! Roll the drum !

Let them menace, let them come,

If they dare !

OCCASIONAL SONNETS

THE Italian Sonnet is admirably suited to the Italian language, by reason of the opulence, perhaps the excessive opulence, of rhymes in that tongue. But though there are not a few Italian Sonnets in our own, of the highest merit and of spontaneously natural construction, the form associated with the practice of Shakespeare lends itself more readily to English verse. Its weakness lies in the closing couplet too often following the quatrains with an anti-climax. In some of the Sonnets here printed the final line is an Alexandrine ; a deviation from precedent left to the judgment of the reader.

A WINTRY PICTURE

Now in the woodlands from the creaking boughs
The last sere leaves are loosened and unstrung,
Where once the tender honeysuckle clung,
And the fond mavis fluted to his spouse.
Already dreaming of her winter drowse,
And brooding dimly on her unborn young,
The dormouse rakes the beechmast, and among
The matted roots the moldwarp paws and ploughs.
Over the furrows brown and pastures grey
The melancholy plovers flap and 'plain ;
And, along shivering pool and sodden lane,
As lower droop the lids of dying day,
Like to a disembodied soul in pain,
The homeless wind goes wailing all the way.

TIME'S DEFENCE

“WHY am I deemed an enemy of men
Who would beyond Life's limit life prolong?
If they believe that they will live again,
How can it be that I have done them wrong?
Is it not I who rout the Winter snows,
And Spring's melodious symphonies renew,
Bring back the blush unto the budding rose,
And christen Summer's birth with morning dew?
'Tis I that ring the silvery nuptial peal,
When streams the Bridal up the rustic nave,
And if around the bier where mourners kneel
I toll the passing-bell and dig the grave,
From death and grief I half dispel the gloom,
Inscribing words of hope upon the loved one's
tomb.”

RESIGNATION

SINCE we the march of Time can-not arrest,
Keep you in step with him till Time shall end :
Thus will you journey with more easeful breast,
Nor mar the rhythm that you cannot mend.
Nor ever yearn impatiently to reap
Harvest allotted unto mellow years,
But, having sown the seed, take care to keep
Its growth from tares till soaring stem appears.
Neither, when Summer from your life shall wane,
And Autumn fruit keep dropping from the bough,
Look back and sigh regretfully in vain
For joys no longer seasonable now :
Thus will your hours make music to the end,
And Life, you loved so, become Death your friend.

TIME'S WEARINESS

SLOW Time, that carrieth such a monstrous load
From every stage and hostel of the Past,
Do you not weary of the endless road,
And ask how long Life's journeying will last?
Still growing burden on your patient back,
Piled are the medley miseries of mankind,
No bourne in sight along the lengthening track,
No comfort seen, before you or behind.
Should you but swerve or stagger in your pace,
Hope with strained halter tuggeth you along,
And where old sores still leave their smarting trace,
Hard on your heels Fate plies its knotted thong.
So must you on, though panting and distressed,
Not even death for solace or for rest.

ANY POET AT ANY TIME

TIME, thou supreme inexorable Judge,
Whom none can bribe, and none can overawe,
Who unto party rancour, private grudge,
Calmly opposeth equitable law,
Before whom advocacy vainly strives
To make the better cause to seem the worse,
To thy Tribunal, when our jangling lives
Are husht, I leave the verdict on my verse.
Irrevocably then wilt thou proclaim
What should have been, what now must ever be,
If in oblivion perish should my name,
Or shine aloft in mighty company.
I to my kind proffering of my poor best,
Remit to Time's arbitrament the rest.

LOVE OF LIFE

WHY love life more, the less of it be left,
And what is left be little but the lees,
And Time's subsiding passions have bereft
One's taste for pleasure, and one's power to please ?
Is it not better, like the waning year,
Without lament resignedly to fade,
Since by enduring ordinance all things here
Are in their season shattered and decayed ?
If you have shared in April's freshest song,
And Summer can without reproach recall,
Yearn not Autumnal harvest to prolong,
Nor shrink from Winter that awaits us all ;
But, lightened of the load of earthly ties,
Pursue with homeward step your journey to the
skies.

TOO LATE

HAD you but shown me living what you show,
Now I am gone, to keep my grave-plot green,
And I but known what vainly now I know,
Lying here alone, how happy had I been !
If you with smiles had gladdened our joint home,
As now you drench my tenement with tears,
Up life's ascent together had we clomb,
And traversed hand-in-hand the slope of years.
Still is it solacing to feel you lay
Upon my sepulchre devoted flowers,
When hitherward you wend your widowed way
'Neath scorching sunshine or through drifting
 showers.
Pity that love is oftentimes forced by Fate,
In this unpunctual World, to come—too late !

FORGIVENESS

Now bury with the dead years conflicts dead
And with fresh days let all begin anew.
Why longer amid shrivelled leaf-drifts tread,
When buds are swelling, flower-sheaths peeping
through ?

Seen through the vista of the vanished years,
How trivial seem the struggle and the crown,
How vain past feuds, when reconciling tears
Course down the channel worn by vanished frown.
How few mean half the bitterness they speak !
Words more than feelings keep us still apart,
And, in the heat of passion or of pique,
The tongue is far more cruel than the heart.
Since love alone makes it worth while to live,
Let all be now forgiven, and forgive.

SPIRITUAL LOVE

COULD you but give me all that I desire,
I should be richer, and you no more poor,
Companionship beside the household fire,
And common cares that train one to endure.
'Tis not your senses, but your self, I want,
Kinship of vision, sympathy of mind,
That so the bond be based on adamant,
And Love made fast by sanctities that bind.
Yet do not think insensible my gaze
To delicate loveliness of form and face,
But that I covet in the same embrace
The Spirit's yearnings with the body's grace.
Give me all these, and add, with lengthening years,
The sweet sad smile, and piety of tears.

AN AUTUMN HOMILY

HERE let us sit beneath this oak, and hear
The acorns fitfully fall one by one,
The final harvest of the fading year
Now Summer eves and Autumn days are done.
The orchard rows stand desolate and bare,
Even the mellow quince is gathered now ;
The furrow yields the sickle to the share,
And lonely trunks stretch out the leafless bough.
Thus wanes the body ere the mind decays,
And through the heart the vernal sap still flows,
While warm within, on short-lived winter days,
The soul's clear lamp unflickeringly glows.
So are we one with Nature, in the round
Of seasonable change, knit by some tie profound.

THE EVENING LIGHT

I

ANGELS their silvery trumpets blow,
At dawn, to greet the Morning Glow,
And mortals lift adoring eyes
To see the glorious sun arise.
Then, winged by Faith, and spurred by Hope
Youth scans the hill, youth scales the slope.
Its pulses bound, its thoughts exult,
It finds no danger difficult,
Quickens its pace, disdaining ease
Victor before it comes and sees,
Feeling the Universe its own,
The Sovereign of a Self-made Throne.

II

Each hope fulfilled, obtained each prayer,
We glory in the Noonday Glare.
Welcome the blinding heat of strife,
Deeming resistance part of life.
We deal the blow, return the stroke,
Fighting our way through dust and smoke,
Until, our battle-banner furlled,
We tower above a conquered World ;
Whether one leads mankind along
By gift of speech or grace of song,
Seizes by forceful hand the helm,
Or adds an Empire to the Realm,
Confronts the sun with forehead bare,
Exulting in the Noonday Glare.

III

But, as the lengthening shadows glide
Silent towards the eventide,
And dew baptizes leaf and flower
In twilight's sanctuary hour,
A sacred Something haunts the air,
Tender as love, devout as prayer,
And in the lofty dome afar
Glimmers one bright outriding star,
Announcing to the watchful sight
Coming battalions of the Night.
Then Noonday Glare and Morning Glow
Fade into shadowy Long-ago.
One feels Earth's vain ambitions fade
Into the vanished dust they made.

All that the glow of dawn foretold,
And all the glare of noon unrolled,
Seem nothing to the quiet joy
No clamour mars, no cares destroy,
'Twixt restless day and restful night,
That cometh with the Evening Light.

THE END

MR. ALFRED AUSTIN'S POEMS

EXTRACTS from an ARTICLE in the *Quarterly Review* of 15th January 1908 on "THE POETRY OF MR. ALFRED AUSTIN."

"FOR poetry of the objective kind the primary equipment of the poet must include a wide outlook on life, an instinctive insight into the motives of other men and women and the varieties of human circumstance, together with some formal or at all events some virtual philosophy, by means of which the facts of life are bound together or focalised, and, being thus referred to the origin or the ultimate potentialities of humanity, are made the subjects of emotions indefinitely wider than, but comparable to, those which are excited by the passions of the individual human being. In subjective poetry, such as that of a Sappho or a Keats, philosophy and a general knowledge of men and women go for nothing. In objective poetry, such as that of a Dante, a Shakespeare, and a Goethe, they are not indeed everything, but they are the first thing. They are not the fire on the altar, but they are the offering to which the fire is applied. In other words, when we are dealing with any objective poet—and the greatest poets of the world have belonged to the objective order—the ultimate standard by which his rank and his significance are to be measured is what he means as a thinker, as an observer, and as an impassioned critic of life, not the manner in which he produces his notes as a singer. The importance of the latter is vital, but it is subsidiary to the importance of the former.

"Mr. Austin's poetry, considered comprehensively, belongs to the objective order, and requires, in common with that of the greatest poets of the world, to be judged by the kind of standard to which we have just alluded. Whatever its merits otherwise, it is more than a series of 'effusions' which can be dismissed as good or bad in accordance with their individual prettiness. It must be taken as the work of a man who has, for a long series of years, endeavoured with a consistency which can only now be appreciated, to deliver a message to the

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world (if so hackneyed a phrase may be forgiven to us), the content of which, from his earliest expressions of it to his latest, has known little other change than that of continuous development. What Mr. Austin's message to his contemporaries becomes much more apparent when we glance at his works collectively than it is if we confine ourselves to a perusal, however careful, of any one of them. We will do our best to present it in brief terms to the reader, as it is only through a consideration of this that we can estimate Mr. Austin fairly.

"Mr. Austin's character has been happily touched upon and illustrated by a brother poet, Mr. William Watson, who has contributed a critical preface to a collection of Mr. Austin's minor poems. 'To be frankly local,' Mr. Watson truly says, 'in the sense in which Burns and Béranger—yes, and one may add Homer and Virgil—are local, has not seldom been a direct road into the general heart of man,' and Mr. Austin, he proceeds, local as he mainly is at once by temperament and intention, may justly regard his localism as one means of reaching the universal. Mr. Watson explains himself by saying that in the Poet Laureate's character two 'dominant notes' are 'love of country' and 'love of *the* country,' and he shows by the case of Shakespeare how this double patriotism may make the poet greater as a poet by making him a virile and impassioned citizen. There are two points, however, which we think Mr. Watson has neglected, and which require to be mentioned here. Mr. Austin's devotion to his own land, and his patriotic sense that, for himself at least, it is superior to any other, is accompanied, as it could not have been in the case either of Burns or Shakespeare, by a sympathy with the local genius of other countries also, especially of Greece and Italy, which is founded on wide knowledge of their literatures and personal familiarity with their life. His British preferences have therefore no tinge of provincialism. Further, that love of 'the' country, as opposed to the town, which Mr. Watson rightly specifies as one of his most distinctive traits, implies far more than a susceptibility to those aspects of nature which 'haunted Wordsworth like a passion,' and were the main inspiration of Keats. For Mr. Austin love of the country is closely associated with a philosophy of social life which is, in an age like the present, so distinct and challenging as to merit the appellation of polemical. It is a philosophy in which there is no note of asceticism, but which is nevertheless a protest

ON MR. ALFRED AUSTIN'S POEMS

against excessive personal luxury, and the kinds of ambition and the kinds of activity which minister to it. Every rank and avocation, from the peasant's up to the prince's, has, in his view, its proper dignity, and, when set in appropriate circumstances, its proper beauty. Wealth, as he conceives of it, is ideally the symbolical adornment and the necessary material mechanism of certain high activities, far-reaching social services, and lives whose wholesome tenour becomes influential by reason of their conspicuous stateliness, and is not merely the instrument, as to many of its present possessors it seems to be, of a competitive self-indulgence which degrades and vulgarises those who make it their chief object, and generates a bitter and gratuitous discontent amongst others by offering them a base example which they are not able to imitate.

"The fact that he began his poetic career as a satirist, introduces us to a fundamental trait of his character, and exhibits him as being before all things a normal and healthy man, in close contact with realities, judging his fellows in the light of lofty and courageous principles, and denouncing vice and frivolity, not as a fanatic, but as a man of the world and a philosopher. He is not a poet as distinguished from a man of the world, but he is a man of the world distinguished by possessing the temperament of a poet.

"The poetical works of the Laureate are too numerous and voluminous to admit of our referring in detail to more than the most important and representative of them; but the foregoing examination of his attitude and character generally will enable us to see at once into what groups his works naturally divide themselves, and to understand what, in each case, have been his aims and the nature of his inspiration. He is, as we set out with observing, not distinctively a lyrical or subjective poet. The lyrical impulse is nevertheless strong in him; and a series of lyrics—many of them being of an autobiographical kind—has accompanied his larger and less personal works. Of these last the most important consist of five dramas, and one long romance or philosophical novel in verse. The five dramas are 'The Tower of Babel,' 'Savonarola,' 'Alfred the Great,' 'Fortunatus the Pessimist,' and 'Prince Lucifer.' The romance is 'The Human Tragedy.' Our most satisfactory course will be to deal with these groups separately, taking the dramas first, then 'The Human Tragedy,' and the lyrical poems last.

"His dramas are themselves separable into two groups.

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The first comprises 'The Tower of Babel,' 'Savonarola,' and 'Alfred the Great,' and may in a broad sense be called political. The second comprises 'Fortunatus,' the Pessimist' and 'Prince Lucifer'; and may, in contradistinction to the former, be described as mainly philosophical.

"To 'The Tower of Babel' the author gives a second title, namely, 'A Celestial Love-drama,' which we regard as being infelicitous, and doing injustice to his intentions. Nothing could well be more remote from the interests of the present day than a celestial love-drama enacted on the plain of Shinar. But the main interest of Mr. Austin's poem is, as he himself gives us to understand, not the philanderings of one of the sons of God with one of the daughters of men. He means us to take the poem as a symbolical representation of the ambitious attempts of human society to escape from its own limitations by means of an enlarged control over the resources of material life. 'The Tower of Babel,' for Mr. Austin, means the modern world endeavouring to found happiness and dignity on a mere accumulation of wealth, in the manner which he attacks in 'The Season' and 'The Golden Age.' The love-story of his drama deals with the visit of a winged spirit to the earth, in the course of which he becomes enamoured of the wife of the chief builder of the tower. The wife has long regretted what she divines to be the insensate ambition of her husband, and she finds relief in a purely platonic intimacy with this visitant from another world. The husband, however, having been at last killed when the tower is thrown down by the deity, the wife finds happiness in a complete union with her lover; and the moral of the drama is that, though man by material means cannot lift earth to heaven, the higher affections are a means by which heaven may be drawn down to earth.

"In 'Savonarola' and 'Alfred the Great' he preaches a cognate moral, but his means in both these cases are much better suited to his ends. The Florence of Savonarola and the Medici is for him not an historical Florence only. It is a symbol of the world to-day, and the corruption due to an excessive struggle after the merely material appliances of civilisation. The love-story here, which has no winged spirit either for hero or heroine, is meant to portray in the colours of daily life those simple yet supreme satisfactions of the human spirit which, adorned by culture, yet uncorrupted by luxury, constitute, as Aristotle taught, the apex of the moral triangle,

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and lie not only between, but above, the too much and the too little. At the same time, in Savonarola's end Mr. Austin symbolises the weaknesses which beset endeavour of even the noblest kind, and the irony of fate which either thwarts it or denies completeness to its results. 'Alfred the Great,' again celebrates a healthy and elevated love as the master-key to human felicity; but this doctrine is here connected with an exhibition of the nobility of inherited power which realises that its chief splendour is derived from far-reaching and heroic work successfully performed for others. The times of King Alfred are, for the imaginations of most Englishmen, almost as shadowy as those of King Arthur: but Mr. Austin, to institute an inevitable comparison, makes of his national hero a far more living and a far more intelligent man than Lord Tennyson, with portent and miracle to aid him, made of his 'blameless king.' Mr. Austin's typical English ruler, who himself translates Boethius, seeks to disseminate learning amongst his semi-barbarous subjects, to unite a dismembered country under an intelligible system of government, and to lay the foundations of an efficient national navy, is, as a symbolical figure, much more useful and stimulating than the wielder of an enchanted sword, and the head of a body of knight-errants—men whose main business, when they were not unhorsing and maiming one another, was to prosecute a series of private and now meaningless adventures.

"Mr. Austin's two philosophical dramas, 'Fortunatus the Pessimist' and 'Prince Lucifer,' are, we think, in respect of their general scheme, still better constructed, with reference to his inner purpose, than 'Savonarola' or 'Alfred the Great.' The action of both takes place in the present day; but Mr. Austin, while keeping in touch with contemporary conditions and types of character, contrives with much artistic ingenuity to generalise them and even to universalise them. We will give the reader the story of both these poems, which will enable him to understand the scope of the poet's meaning, and to follow us presently when we refer to their strictly literary merits.

"In 'Fortunatus,' 'Prince Lucifer,' and 'The Human Tragedy,' the genius of Mr. Austin reaches its high-water mark. The two dramas are obviously not meant for acting; and, unlike the 'Faust' of Goethe—itself wholly unactable—they have no situations which could be made effective on the stage; but, as related to the intention of the author, they are

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skilful and impressive in their construction, and they exhibit marked originality in the manner in which characters and incidents belonging to the present epoch are detached from what is merely temporary and affiliated to what is enduring and universal. This is specially true of 'Fortunatus.' The manner in which modern Kent, with its woodlands, its clergy, its landed proprietors, and its peasants, is converted, without afflicting us with any sense of the incongruous, into a world in which the spirit of evil follows his trade as a pedlar and plies his spells at night within a magic circle of glow-worms, shows Mr. Austin to possess the imagination of a true poet. In 'The Human Tragedy' the modernism is more literal; and here, on other grounds, a tribute should be paid to the writer, who essays to lift actual events, still comparatively recent, into the loftiest regions of feeling and comprehensive thought of a narrative whose events, otherwise treated, might have been those of an ordinary novel.

"Enough, we think, has now been said to show that for the post which Mr. Austin occupies he has many signal qualifications. No other living English writer of verse, so far as we know, unites in the same degree the qualifications of the scholar, the scholarly traveller, the keen student of politics, the close observer of actual warfare, the speculative thinker, the devoted cultivator of the Muses, and the friend of the farmer and the cottager. But we have not called attention to Mr. Austin's many accomplishments, described his principal works, and indicated his far-reaching, many-sided and lofty aims merely in order to show that he is worthy of the official laurel. Our principal object has been to bring home to the general reader the fact that when Mr. Austin addresses his contemporaries as a poet, they are not being addressed by any mere maker of verses, but by a systematic thinker and a man of exceptional gifts, who has serious things to express, and who is compelled by the fatality of his nature to use verse as his means of expressing them.

"These passages from 'The Human Tragedy,' together with those which we have selected from his two best dramas, though we might have multiplied them with advantage, had this been practicable, are enough to demonstrate the one fact on which we are here anxious to insist, namely, that Mr. Austin knows as well as anybody what musical, polished, and lucid verse is, and is perfectly capable of producing it. He need fear no rivalry in these respects from any living writer."

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THE GARDEN THAT I LOVE

THE POET LAUREATE ON GARDEN MAGIC

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knows, a step of doubtful wisdom ; or, as he puts it, 'striking the rock twice is, as a rule, rather a useless performance,' but his defence (amply justified by his success) is that 'after a lapse of a dozen or so years, the same thing is no longer the same thing.' 'One sometimes hears that a subject has been done to death. Then bring it to life again, if you can, by breathing into it your own personality, your mind, heart, and soul'; and if sometimes he handles themes that have become trite, he has always something to say as fresh and inspiring as a breath from his beloved garden."—*Birmingham Post*.

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